



Northern Neck Audubon News

The Northern Neck of Virginia Chapter of the National Audubon Society

P.O. Box 991, Kilmarnock, Virginia 22482

www.northernneckaudubon.org

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Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker
Canada Geese

Photos: Joseph Cooney



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UPCOMING

MEETINGS

Chapter Meetings held Upstairs
Lancaster Community Library

Monday, May 7th
3:15 PM Program:

Monday, June 4th
3:15 PM Program
To Be Announced

BIRD WALKS

All at 9:00 AM unless
otherwise specified.

Monday, May 14th
Chilton Woods
*** Guide requests 8:30 arrival.

Saturday, May 26th
Kilmarnock Park and Library

Monday, June 11th
Reedville

Saturday, June 23rd
Voorhees & Westmoreland
Berry Farm

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Finally, I think it's okay to say, "Happy Spring!" It appears to be here for real. At last. Our last two programs started the winter thaw. Bill Young joined us in March to bring us out of our winter funk and remind us of 100 reasons to be intrigued by avian species. Bob Schamerhorn focused on warblers and their songs. At that time we just needed to be patient and await the arrival of our migrants. It seemed to take longer than usual. But now that we have April's end and May's beginning, I quote a famous movie: "They're heeeerrrrreeeee!"



Photos.....Paul Servis

I've been doing a little birding and have found many FOS (or "first of season") birds. I never used to keep track of this for any species other than the osprey; but now I find it intriguing to compare the dates for first arrivals and final departures, from year to year. The latest incomers in my area are the White-Eyed Vireo, the Yellow-Throated Vireo, the Common Yellowthroat, the Black and White Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Redstart, Ovenbird and Indigo Bunting. Some, like the Palm Warbler, just pass through while heading for their northern breeding grounds. I must emphasize that I heard most of them before I saw them.

Soon it will begin to get hard to see the songbirds in the trees. The foliage is going to bust out and hide them. Shadows cast by the leaves in the wind will add some difficulty...and then, there are those larger insects to distract the eye.

I've heard a few people mention how difficult it is to see birds in the summer; and for some of us, there are the floaters in our eyes that cause a bit of havoc. Ah, the challenges of aging with grace and dignity, but I digress.

My point is this: if there's a bird song you don't know, get out there now while it's easier to see them. Let's try to decrease your level of frustration before it even starts. Find your bird, listen to it, and listen to it again. Spend time listening and watching. Write down what you hear, in YOUR words. For example, the White-Throated Sparrow is quoted as singing, "Poor Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody"; but if YOU hear, "Tweeeet, tweeeet twee-duddy, twee duddy," that's perfectly okay. That's what YOU heard and that's what you'll remember.

Try to mimic it yourself. If you have an audio recording function on your phone, record the song so that you can listen to it later. When you get home, you can search The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology website to compare your notes and audio files with what's on-line. You may find that your bird sings with an accent (I fondly call it "Neckinese"). If you hear their songs now, it will make it much easier to "find" them in a month when the trees are fully leafed out.

...Melissa Gross

(No hiding in the foliage here!)



CHAPTER UPDATES

There has been a lot going on in the past couple of months! I want to thank everyone who has been involved, from attendance at our meetings to participation at Hickory Hollow.

We have updated our by-laws and are almost ready to approve them. We've added an advocacy committee and have streamlined other committees. We have our chapter election coming up in June when we will fill three new director positions, vote on a new secretary and a new vice-president.

Hickory Hollow has been and will continue to be high on our priority list. There follows an overview of the most recent housekeeping efforts there.



APRIL 22nd, 2018

We've been excited to participate in the Waterfowl Show in White Stone as well as in Earth Day's April celebration in Heathsville. Upcoming outreach opportunities are the Go Wild event (notice on Page 8) held by the Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends on Sunday, May 20th, and the Strawberry Festival in Heathsville on May 26th.

Our speaker at the May meeting will be Matt Overton, who works with Dominion Power. He will discuss efforts Dominion is making to reduce avian collisions with power lines.

We were happy to be able to honor a grant request from the Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends, who were awarded funds to purchase kavaks and oars.

...AND, also at the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge...Milkweed Planting. The Refuge has been awarded 2,080 common and swamp milkweed plugs from the Monarch Watch. These are to be planted in 50 acres of grasslands within the refuge, and we need your help to get the plugs planted and thriving for wildlife.

WHERE: 336 Wilna Road, Warsaw.

Meet at the field next to Wilna Lodge.

WHEN: May 25, 29, 31 from 9:00 am to 12:30 PM.

HOW: Sign up via e-mail to biologist:

Lauren cruz@fws.gov, with your dates.

BRING: Water, snacks, tools of choice.

WHO: All are welcome!

...Melissa Gross

HICKORY HOLLOW

Saturday, April 14th was a beautiful day to spend at Hickory Hollow, in contrast to our originally scheduled cleanup day, April 7th. Six hardworking NNAS members gathered at 9:30 AM with pruning saws, loppers, rakes and gloves. They were assigned trails and given notebooks and pencils to document any downed trees, confusing signage or other trail hazards. By the end of the cleanup, we had removed light debris from all 5.23 miles of trail, counted 16 down trees blocking the pathways, developed a plan for reblazing the trails and noted one very large black snake climbing a tree.

It was a very successful day. The Chapter thanks Melissa Gross, Chloe Fridley, David Fridley, Betsy Washington, Kevin Howe and Nancy Garvey for a morning spent on this long overdue task.

We will be scheduling two more workdays to address the downed trees and the blazing project. Picnic table and bench on the Tom Teeples Trail (green) will need replacing as well. Dates will be posted on the hot-line, the website, and in local newspapers.

....Nancy Garvey

BIRDING TIPS by FELICITY

Almost everyone loves a woodpecker: easy to see, easy to hear and, usually, easy to find. Annoyingly, it is less easy to decide which one you are watching, and even harder to decide which one you are hearing; but much easier than figuring out warblers, for instance, and definitely a good category for beginners.

As a new birder, I remember announcing with great delight that the bird we were watching was a "Red-Headed Woodpecker." Easy, as it wore a bright red helmet of feathers. "Wrong," I was firmly told. "That is a Red-Bellied Woodpecker"; but as far as I could see, the silly thing didn't have anything close to a red belly, so why call it that? What was the difference? Apparently, plenty!

We are lucky in our area to have seven woodpeckers to puzzle out: Pileated, Northern Flicker, Red-Bellied, Red-Headed, Hairy, Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker and Downy. The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, an 8th species, is being successfully reintroduced in pine woods in southern Virginia; but seeking this one is best left to experienced birders who may have run out of species to add to their Virginia life list.

Becoming familiar with the various woodpecker sizes is the best place to start: i.e. two large (Pileated and Northern Flicker) and two smaller (Downy and Sapsucker). The other three are considered to be intermediate in size. Intermediate? To What? Turns out that size is not a precise measure and appears to vary depending on light, temperature, height and distance from the bird: so, don't drive yourself silly trying to figure out an exact size. Enough to know that in Woodpecker-Speak, a Pileated is large and a Downy is small. In size, they all fall somewhere between a Tufted Titmouse and an American Crow.

In a sudden moment of doubt, I actually looked the dimensions up and was chagrined to find that I did have the Sapsucker out of order. I have had many a heated argument with my

husband about birds' relative size (no peaceful discussions in this family!) which he always wins. Still, when making field notes about an unknown bird, I find it useful roughly to compare a bird's size to that of a more familiar species; but, as I said, don't be too exacting, as this is just a starting point.

Woodpeckers are usually seen climbing trees, except, perhaps for the Sapsucker, that glues itself to the tree's side. Then, when you almost have it fixed in your binoculars, it slides perversely to the other side of the tree. So, of course, you miss the white wing stripe that would have given you an instant identification.



Adult woodpeckers all have some red on the head, so the presence of red is not much help in firming up the exact species...except for the Red-Headed, which is unmistakable for its *completely* red head, face, and short red neck. Its body resembles a checkerboard, with a squareish black upper part and a squareish white lower. In flight, the same distinct colors show. The juvenile is quite unlike the parents, with a brownish head. In time you will use the amount and placement of red on the other woodpeckers to help differentiate the genders; but initially you can forget age and gender until you have nailed the separate IDs.

All woodpeckers have different arrangements of black and white, except the Northern Flicker, which is brown and black. It is a good idea to compare illustrations in your field guide, because each woodpecker has a distinctive mark that will confirm its ID.

The Red-Bellied is best described as noisy, ubiquitous and greedy. This one and the Downy are the most likely to be regulars at your suet feeder. Don't bother looking for the eponymous red belly, as it is hard to see. It is there, but subtle in shading. It may be more visible in breeding season or lit with a shaft of sunlight. Easy to spot are the red nape (both male and female) and red back of head (male). Remember, it's not the *whole* head!. Learn the bird's call, and you will realize that it is, indeed, everywhere.



Red-Bellied Woodpecker

....Photo: Paul Servis

The Downy is a petite, dainty and charming little bird with a thorn-like bill. It looks very similar to the Hairy but is supposed to be at least three inches smaller....except that a large female Downy can be bigger than a small male Hairy....(or is it the female Hairy that is bigger. etc.???). What I do know is that most of the small woodpeckers you will see in our area will be Downys. The field guide describes the Downy as having black dots on the white outer tail feathers. These are absent on the white outer tail feathers of the Hairy. Look for these black spots as the bird feeds at a suet cake or creeps up a tree. They are there, and in time they become surprisingly easy to see; but apparently, Hairys on the Pacific Coast also have spots on their white outer tail feathers.

There you have it: not too difficult and oh, so rewarding, when you can win the ID point on a NNAS bird outing!

Please compare the illustrations of these seven woodpeckers in your bird guide and listen to the recordings of woodpecker calls. You can check with www.allaboutbirds.org to see both the comparative illustrations and to hear the respective calls. It is a good idea to keep a list of the one feature of each species that will most likely clinch your ID.

IDENTITY CLUES

PILEATED: Large, permanently raised crest (remember "Woody the Woodpecker")

NORTHERN FLICKER: White rump, most obvious when flying, and a black, semicircular neck pendant.

RED-BELLIED: Red nape or red nape coupled with red back of head.

RED-HEADED: Completely red head, face and neck.

HAIRY: No black spots on outer tail feathers.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER;
White wing stripe visible both at rest and in flight.

DOWNY: Black spots on outer tail feathers.

This article has been written in honor of Frank Schaff, who with his lovely, quiet, and unassuming manner, taught me so much.

.....Felicity Rask

BIRD LORE

Reviewing Bob Schamerhorn's warbler talk put me in mind of the mnemonics we use to fix in our heads the bird songs that are diagnostic to each species. I notice that each Spring, some of these sound familiar; but without the aid of words attached to melody, the identity remains elusive. For whatever evolutionary and neurotransmittal reasons, humans use words to enhance memory. If we ever caroled wordlessly to each other as our principal form of messaging, we did so in the *Homo habilis* or Neanderthal past. (The idea of a Neanderthal soprano gives one pause). Therefore, our field guides ascribe syllables to avian arias:

Carolina Wren: "Teakettle, teakettle, teakettle."

White-Throated Sparrow: "Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody"(US); Oh, Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada" (Obviously, in Canada).

Song Sparrow: "Maids, maids, maids in the kitchen, kitchen, kitchen."

White-Eyed Vireo: "Chick Pireo Wee."

Northern Cardinal: "What cheer? What cheer? What cheer?"

Barred Owl: "Who cooks for You? Who cooks for you...all?"

Great Horned Owl: "Who's awake? Me, too."

Summer Tanager: "Pikki Tuck Tuck."

Eastern, Rufous-Sided Towhee: "Drink your tea."

Eastern Kingbird: "KitterKitterKitter."

Ruby-Crowned Kinglet: "See, see, see you, you you, look at me, look at me."

There are those that announce their names as they sing, eliminating the need to guess:

Chickadee: "Chickadee, dee, dee."

Chuck Will's Widow: "Chk...willswidow."

Eastern Phoebe: "Feebee," without the *Greek* Phi.

Yellow-Billed Cuckoo: " Cukukukakaka kalp."

....Letha Harris

NOT TO BE MISSED

A Bird Walk in Chilton Woods

On Monday, May 14th, I'll be leading a bird walk at The Chilton Woods State Forest. I visited this property in early March. At that time, there weren't a whole lot of migrants around, but it was very peaceful, and the pine needles on the ground smelled crisp. By the middle of May, I think we will have a smorgasbord of warblers, thrushes, gnatcatchers and flycatchers.

One trail is a loop of @one mile with very little, if any, elevation change. The other pathway, two+ miles in length, includes a utility right-of-way; so it is a little challenging to anyone with limited mobility.

We can determine on the morning itself which route to choose; and if there are enough participants, we can split up. We can also opt to do both trails if time allows.

Please wear sturdy shoes, consider using bug repellent, bring water and a snack. We have loaner binoculars if anyone needs these or would like to try out a different viewing system.

Let's meet at the end of the utility right-of-way around 8:30 AM so that we can start at 9:00. We hope to see you there, as this is one of those hidden gems of the Northern Neck that is well worth seeing...not that I'm biased, or anything.

.....Melissa Gross

www.dof.virginia.gov/stateforest/list/chilton-woods.htm



APRIL'S PROGRAM

Lovely though they are, the winsome warblers seem to fall at the tail end of many a list...their "w" initial letter leaves them alphabetically late, their finely developed differentiation places them as taxonomic latecomers, their subtle differences leave them nearly last for the ambitious birder to learn, and, as per Bob Schamerhorn's April presentation, they have generally found their phonics at the end of the alphabet. This will not be the storied O of Alpha to Omega, but the common American "ZEEE."

In his "Wonderful Wood Warblers," Bob combined his eminent skills as a nature photographer with pointers for identifying each of his showcased birds. Some thirty species migrate through Virginia just at this juncture, like the Yellow Warbler, timing its arrival to caterpillar emergence. "Listen," said Bob, for "Sweet, sweet, sweet; a little bit of sweet," and rhyming along with the Cape May's "Seet- seet- seet-seet." Not quite that "Z," but close. Blue-Winged and Golden-Winged, close relatives of each other, do emit the bee-buzz calls, and the Northern Parula cranks up its Z-sound, according to Bob, like an overwound toy.

Flying by night and at great heights, the Black-Throated Green Warbler takes periodic breaks, letting us hear still one more "Zee- zee- zee- zo- zee." Another, the Prairie Warbler, ascends the chromatic scale, spacing its "Zees" evenly while raising their tones. Also fond of a rising song, the Black-Throated Blue rasps its "Beer, Beer. Beer" in the same cadence. This warbler maintains its colors throughout the year.

Black and White Warbler



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These auditory guides are especially crucial to warbler identification. These are small birds, regularly seen in the midst of migration, flying high or, if in low trees, moving skittishly. Because they are often brightly backlit and because the species share a silhouette, song can be more helpful than sight for making an ID.



Common Yellowthroat

That said, Bob brought along his gorgeous photographs as visual tutorials. "First among equals," was the Chestnut-Sided Warbler, a veritable Good Humour Creamsicle of lemon-lime overtones, yellow cap and cranberry side stripe. For unmistakable markings, the Common Yellowthroat male wears, of course, a canary ascot beneath his raccoon mask of feathered jet. The Yellowthroat gives another clue, singing "witchety-witchety-witchety" from its chosen environment of scrub thickets. No one could confuse the sharp Edwardian stripes of the Black and White with the pattern of another warbler.

Since blacks, citrines, olives and yellows prevail with the warblers, many are simply too subtly tinted and too similar to each other for the birder to identify them easily, given small size and constant movement. For this reason, the rising and falling, the starting and stopping, the sibilance and roughness of their chains of "Zees" are "vital signs."

Letha Harris

Further information and photos available from Bob Schamerhorn's website:

www.iPhotoBirds.com

GO WILD!

Sunday, May 20th

11-4 p.m.

FREE ADMISSION



Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge Annual Celebration

Hutchinson Tract, 19180 Tidewater Trail, Tappahannock, VA 22560

KID-FRIENDLY & EDUCATIONAL

TRAM TOURS

Wildlife Habitat Tour
Art/Photography Tour
Native Plant Tour
History tour

PONTOON BOAT TOURS ON MT. LANDING CREEK

Two pontoon boats
Tours led by Joe McCauley and
Richard Moncure
Expect to see Bald Eagles, Osprey, and
Heron

CONTACT INFO

804.366.6851
www.rwrfriends.org
Find us on Facebook:
Rappahannock Wildlife Refuge Friends

EVENTS

Archery
Exhibitors
Target Shooting
Face Painting
Birdhouse Building
Life-sized Eagle's Nest
Kids' Binocular Bird Hunt
Native Plant Sale

SILENT AUCTION

Closes at 2:30 p.m.
Unique items including
oyster float and rain barrels

FREE FOOD

Hot dogs
Cake, Cookies
Lemonade, Water

Application for Membership in NNAS - Chapter Code X50, 7XCH

- ☐ Local Chapter Only Membership - \$15.00 annually, renewable in June; includes chapter on-line newsletter.
- ☐ National & Local Membership - \$20.00 introductory (\$35.00 after), is above, plus glossy National Audubon Magazine.
 Make checks payable to "National Audubon Society".

Name _____ Phone _____ - _____

Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____



Northern Neck Audubon Society Resources

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|----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|--|
| President | Melissa Gross | Birdhouse | Open | Website www.northernneckaudubon.org suggestions to: nnas1970@gmail.com Newsletter - five issues annually submit ideas, articles etc. to: waterthrush@verizon.net |
| Vice President | Sandy Dodge | C. Easement | Jeff Wright | |
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